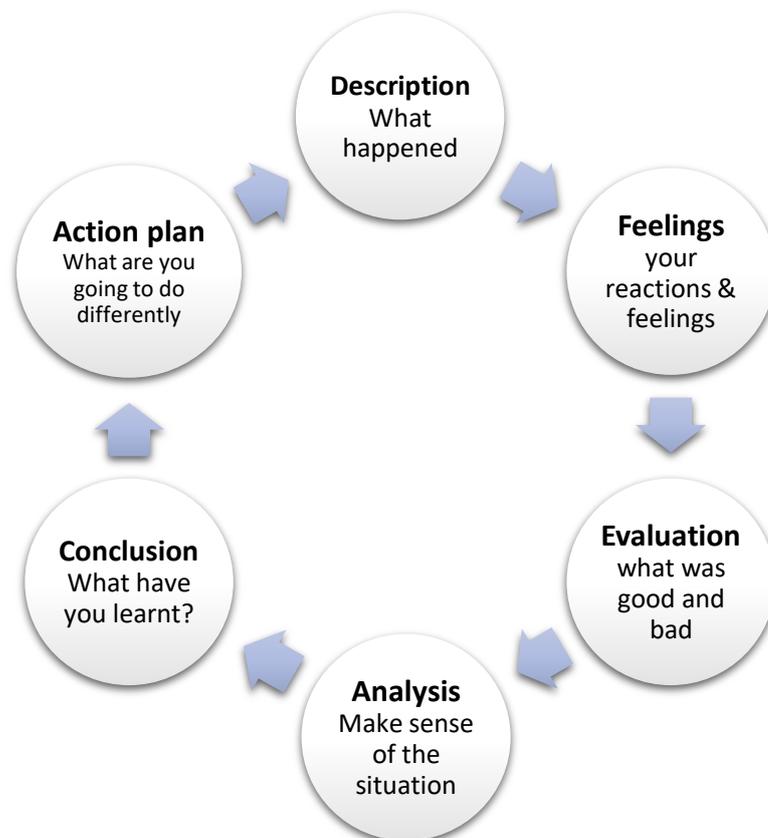


Gibbs' reflective cycle

[Gibbs \(1988, p.49\)](#) created his “structured debriefing” to support experiential learning. It was designed as a continuous cycle of improvement for a repeated experience but can also be used to reflect on a standalone experience. One of the key things about Gibbs is the acknowledgement of the importance of *Feelings* in reflection. He also separates out *Evaluation* - what went well as well as what didn't. These extra stages make it a useful model for some practitioner courses but some find them prescriptive.

The 6 stages.



Description

Here you set the scene:

- What happened,
- When it occurred,
- Who was there,
- What did they do,
- What was the outcome.

It's important to remember to keep the information provided relevant and to-the-point. Don't waffle on about details that aren't required –if you do this, you're just using up valuable words that you'll get minimal marks for.

Feelings

Discuss your feelings and thoughts about the experience. Consider questions such as:

- How did you feel at the time?
- What did you think at the time?
- What impact did your emotions, beliefs and values have?
- What do you think other people were feeling?
- What did you think about the incident afterwards?

You can discuss your emotions honestly but remember that this is an academic piece of writing, so avoid 'chatty' text and 'dear diary'.

Evaluation

How did things go? Focus on the positive and negative even if it was primarily one or the other.

- What was good and what was bad about the experience?
- What went well? What didn't?
- Were your contributions positive or negative.
- If you are writing about a difficult incident, did you feel that the situation was resolved afterwards?

Analysis

This is where you make sense of what happened, using the theory and wider context to develop understanding.

- Why did things go well? Badly?
- How can the theory explain what happened?
- How does my experience compare to the literature?
- What research/theories/models can help me make sense of this?
- Could I have responded in a different way?
- What might have helped or improved things?

This section is very important, particularly for higher level writing. Many students receive poor marks for reflective assignments for not bringing the theory and experience together.

Conclusion

Gibbs actually proposed two conclusions: a general one, which could be transferable and a specific one, focused your personal situation. These are now normally merged but the idea may help focus your conclusion.

- What have you learnt? Generally, and specifically
- What can I now do better?
- Could/should you have done anything differently?
- What skills would I need to handle this better?

Action plan

Action plans sum up anything you need to know and do to improve for next time.

- How /where can I use my new knowledge and experience?
- How will I adapt my actions or improve my skills?
- If the same thing happened again, what would I do differently?

Using Gibbs' reflective model in reflective writing

The following text is an example of a piece of reflective writing, following Gibbs' model. The task was to write a reflection about an incident which occurred during the first few weeks of a teaching placement (1000 words). Please note that the references used are fictional. If you are not a student teacher, use [OneSearch](#) or your [subject resources](#) pages to find resources that explore reflective writing in your subject discipline.

Description

I am currently on a teaching practice placement in an adult education college in the south-west of England, learning how to teach GCSE maths to various groups of adults. As my placement is in the early stages, I am mainly assisting the class tutors and have just started planning and delivering a small part of each lesson. The incident occurred in an evening class during which I was due to deliver my very first session. The class tutor had been teaching the learners about fractions, and my task was to continue with this instruction, looking specifically at how to multiply two fractions. However, when I was due to teach the session, I got to the whiteboard and became so nervous that I struggled to speak to the group. I felt myself visibly shaking and was unable to articulate my first sentence coherently. The students were quite understanding, as they are all mature students who are aware that I am new to teaching and am nervous, but the teacher was unsympathetic and responded by taking over the lesson whilst I sat at the back of the room trying not to cry. I left the session as soon as the class was over, and did not speak to anyone.

Feelings

I felt extremely miserable at the time and even considered leaving my teacher training course. I was also embarrassed and upset by my own inability to speak in front of the group, but I was also extremely angry with the class teacher for her response in the presence of the learners. I felt afterwards that she had not given me sufficient time to compose myself, and that she should have allowed me to address my nerves. The situation left me very distressed and I rang in sick the following week; it was only when I reflected on the experience that I decided I needed to speak to the placement supervisor. I also realised later that feeling nervous is a natural reaction to speaking in public (Jones, 2000) which made me feel less embarrassed.

Evaluation

At the time, I did not feel that the situation had been resolved at all. I very deliberately left at the end of the class without speaking to the class teacher or the learners. However, after speaking to a fellow trainee about his own experience, I felt much more positive. I realised that everyone feels nervous before their first few classes. This is clear in the relevant literature, as Greene (2006, p. 43) points out, saying that nine out of ten new trainee teachers found their first session "incredibly daunting". It appears that most trainee teachers have moments of being "tongue-tied" and "losing their way with the lesson" (Parbold, 1998, p. 223).

Analysis

The situation was made worse by both my own actions and those of the class teacher. I feel that I should have stood up to her, rather than letting her take control of the lesson, and that I should have spoken to her immediately after the lesson about how I was feeling. Dealing with situations like this immediately is preferable, as Cooper (2001) points out. Instead, I spoke to my placement supervisor several days later, and did not see the class teacher again until a formal meeting consisting of myself, the teacher and the supervisor. Daynes and Farris (2003) say that, by not dealing with situations immediately and personally, and instead taking it to an authority figure, the situation can be made worse. The class teacher could have felt that she was being “ganged up on” (Thomas, 2003, p. 22), which could lead to future problems. The teacher’s actions also made the situation worse, because she did not give me time to overcome my fears and she deliberately embarrassed me in front of the class. She claimed that she had thought she was helping me to overcome my anxieties, but I do not believe that to be the case. However, as we only spoke about the incident over a week later in the meeting with the supervisor, she rightly argued that I should have said something to her at the time.

Conclusion

In retrospect, I would do several things differently. I should have spoken to the class teacher immediately after the session and voiced my opinions. I should also have been more assertive by advising the tutor that I could continue with the lesson. However, the incident made me realise the importance of building up a relationship with the teacher, a skill that Jackson (1999) stresses as fundamental to a successful placement. I feel that, had I developed a professional relationship with the teacher in the preceding weeks, I would have been able to explain how nervous I was beforehand. This would have provided the opportunity to discuss strategies for dealing with nerves and perhaps the incident could have been avoided entirely.

Action Plan

In future, I will ensure that I build up a relationship with colleagues. I am working alongside several different teachers during my placement, and I intend to speak to each of them about my nerves. I have already had a beneficial conversation with one teacher and together we have developed a programme of team-teaching for the next few weeks so that I do not feel so pressurised. I plan to do this with the other class teachers, as it will help them to understand how I feel. I also need to speak to my fellow trainees more often about how they feel, as I think I will be able to learn from them. In terms of training, I have booked onto a presentation skills workshop at University, and intend to follow it up by attending the practise sessions afterwards. This experience has made me realise that I need to gain more confidence with presenting, and I feel addressing my presentation skills will help me to do this.

This extract is adapted from: www.salford.ac.uk